

## Coors Dynasty

# Diversity Tolerated, Up to a Point

By **BELLA STUMBO**,  
*Times Staff Writer*

GOLDEN, Colo.—The Coors clan gathers only rarely—family togetherness, Sunday afternoons spent bouncing the babies and taking happy snapshots out by the garden barbecue is in no way the style of this independent bunch.

But when they do collect for some family celebration, maybe an anniversary or at Christmas, it must be a seething scene of heated disagreement on practically everything. Joe's five sons, all self-described born-again Christians, haggle over such diverse matters as George Bush's choice of a running mate (New York Rep. Jack Kemp and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick were their favorites) to whether AIDS is, in fact, God's pre-Armageddon punishment of homosexuals. At least one of them thinks school prayer is a lousy idea, another dares suggest that alcohol, just like tobacco, should carry health warning labels.

### Back in the Fold

It's mainly brothers Joe Jr., 45, and Grover, 38, the family's two former black sheep, who keep things stirred up. Although both finally came home, they fell largely into line with the Coors family dogma and settled into comfortable corporate positions, it's still hard to predict what random heresies may fall from their mouths. If old Bill and Joe periodically inflame the outside world, Joe Jr. and Grover routinely inflame them.

Grover, for instance, the one-time stringy-haired, anti-war California flower child (but now, however, president of the Coors subsidiary, MicroLithics, which mainly produces military systems), sits in his modest mountain view home, furnished with fake Oriental rugs and biblical literature even in the bathroom, sipping tea and saying stuff like this:

"I like Jane Fonda. And I think it's wonderful, her courage in apologizing [to Vietnam veterans]." This, in a family where the very mention of Jane Fonda's name is enough to cause even the saintly matriarch, Holly, to snarl ungracious condemnation.

What's more, Grover Cleveland Coors even compares Fonda to his own father. "I think she's got the same problem my father's got. She

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### Second of two parts.

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epitomizes the left; he epitomizes the right—but both of them have become symbolic of causes much larger than they are."

Moreover, although none of the Coorses are impressed with George Bush, they would all still sooner vote for a hound dog than *any* Democrat—except for Grover, who actually confesses to the unthinkable: "Sure, I can see myself voting for Dukakis. I'm an economic conservative, but I'm a social liberal, in many ways."

For instance, born-again or not, he's against prayer in public schools. "Look at the Ayatollah's Iran—I think that's about as good a case as any for separation of church and state."

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# COORS: Golden Boys Are Diverse, to a Point

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But it is Joe Jr., the senior son who spent 10 years in family exile over his untimely marriage—now president of Coors' ceramics division—who remains the ranking family heretic, less concerned with politics than business matters and the Bible.

Within minutes, as he sat behind his desk, only blocks from the brewery where his brother Jeff had just likened the Teamsters to a horde of invading Russians, he made his first extraordinary remark: He couldn't see why, he shrugged, his family didn't just give in to the Teamsters' demand, let them have their union vote within the smaller brewery unit.

"Why not get rid of this black cloud [of anti-unionism] that's been hanging over us for years. We attract an awful lot of attention with that. Besides, we had a union before [for 43 years, in fact] and it didn't hurt us."

It even seems to Joe Jr. that maybe Coors is playing dirty pool, by insisting on the larger bargaining unit.

## 'Slave Structure'

"After all, we *did* say that we wouldn't interfere with the union's organizing efforts in the brewery. Don't get me wrong—I don't like the union mentality either; I think it's a slave structure. But, my basic philosophy is that, if you get a union, then you must deserve one."

Even if Grover and Joe Jr. utter enough blasphemy to make old Joe's hair stand on end, when it comes to saying exactly what they think, they are truly their father's sons.

But it's easy to see why, when the senior Coorses were reorganizing their management structure, they bypassed Joe Jr., the oldest son, to make Jeff, 43, company president, with his younger brother, Pete, 42, president of the brewery. These two are 14-carat chips off the old block, good boys always, model reflections of the Coors' way

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Brewery president Pete Coors  
harbors political ambitions.

of doing and thinking. Old Joe never had to throw either of them out of the house even once.

In addition, more than the other brothers, they bristle with ambition.

That, in fact, is how, by all family accounts, they attained their current elevated Coors positions:

Electrified by a remark Bill Coors once made that Coors might bring in some hotshot outsider to take charge of Adolph Coors, the two brothers huddled in instant alarm, then made fast tracks to the senior Coors' inner sanctum, where they made their case in short order—i.e., not only were they experienced, educated and able, but also it would be nothing short of a national business tragedy, practically un-American, to disrupt one of the nation's last, successful family dynasties by breaking the blood-line chain of command.

Since Bill Coors was apparently never really serious in the first place, the two young Turks

emerged, in short order, the conquering scions—apparently before any of the other brothers were even aware that a changing of the guard was in the works.

Pete Coors has also admittedly inherited his father's political ambitions. He wouldn't "rule out" a bid for the U.S. Senate someday, he says with a self-conscious little grin. Meantime, he is the Coors brother most often trotted out nowadays to deal with the public and the media, and the rest of the clan clearly sees him as the family's future political star. Pete is the one, as his mother, Holly, puts it, "who knows how to wave and grin at crowds and all that."

The most obvious result of all this is that Pete Coors doesn't act like the other Coors men, with their blunt, easygoing spontaneity. He is more guarded and wary around strangers, a perpetual edge of tension about him as he visibly struggles to edit his own remarks, to say just the right thing, to avoid, at all costs, another of the famous Coors family gaffes, like poor Uncle Bill's.

Sometimes, he tries, too, to strike a more moderate political stance than the others. At one point during lunch, for example, he even attempted to say a nice word about that most flaming of all liberals, Jesse Jackson. He should've picked somebody easier.

"I've met the Rev. Jackson and I think he's absolutely brilliant. A masterful motivator, and . . . ." That's as far as he got. Coors suddenly looked as if his mouthful of snow peas had turned to sour balls, and, in the next breath, "but, good grief," he blurted, "I can't believe some of the crazy things that guy's done!" To wit, actually kissing Yasser Arafat? Smoking cigars with Fidel Castro? Coors could only shake his head in wonderment—much as his brother, Jeff, had done earlier, discussing their father's womanizing. That's "crazy" behavior, too. It's a word they both like a lot.

But what stops these two pure-

blood young Coorses in their tracks is a single question: How did they feel, in the old days, when their eldest brother was banished into the wilderness because of his premature marriage?

"Well, I guess we just thought it was a problem that had to be worked out between my dad and Joe," Pete Coors says. "It's been so long, but I'm sure we wrestled with it," Jeff Coors says. "Besides, Joe seemed happy enough, doing what he was doing. I'm sure that if he'd asked us to intervene, we would've at least tried."

That's not how Joe Jr. remembers it.

There is about this oldest Coors son, on first sight, an instantly identifiable difference from the others—nothing on the order of brother Pete's tangible tensions. He is precisely the opposite—tall, good-looking, like all the others, with a full head of snow white hair, the same shy, quiet family mannerisms—but with an uncharacteristic air of personal vulnerability.

He explains it with disarming directness, too, not bothering to hide the hurt he still feels at the way the family discarded him so harshly so many years ago.

Those were tough years, he recalls. Since the family cut him off

without a penny, his wife had to quit college to help him finish his education. For the next decade, he literally roamed in the wilderness, floating from job to job, working, among other things, as a stock broker, then a computer programmer for Frontier Airlines, everywhere from Oregon to San Diego.

And there was no measuring, he says quietly, the bitterness, hurt and anger he felt for many years. His grandfather never spoke to him again, he and his family (now four children) were not invited home for holidays. His main contact during those years, he remembers, was over the phone with his heart-broken mother, Holly. And it was

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# COORS: Family Permits a Degree of Diversity

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she, Joe Jr. says, "who finally helped me find the Lord."

Today, Joe Jr. is perhaps the staunchest fundamentalist in the family. Also, he's a self-described golf nut.

And so, he still vividly remembers the day when God first spoke to him directly. He was on a San Diego golf course.

"I was on the 16th hole," he says, eyes so full of emotion and innocent trust that only the most heinous cynic would have even thought to smile. "And suddenly I heard this voice saying to me—I can't explain it clearly," he pauses, groping for words, "but it was just *so real*, and I knew it was God. And He said, 'Go home. Go home.'"

And so he did. But neither Joe nor Bill Coors was impressed in the least with these voices Joe Jr. was hearing on the golf course. They were, in fact, cold as hell, Joe Jr. recalls softly, and they sent him away again, saying only that the family council would consider finding some job for him. "It was all pretty disheartening."

Some time later, the family did send for him. Not to accept him back into the clan, though. "They said I still had to prove to them that I was made of the right stuff," he says.

So he was shuffled all around the company and, most notably, dispatched to a Coors porcelain subsidiary in Oregon for seven long years, before the Coors finally allowed him to come home to Golden—where he was then obliged to work as a vice president in the ceramics company, until just last year, when he was finally promoted to president.

Even today, "what I get paid," he says wryly, "doesn't even come close to what Pete and Jeff earn." Also, he is not allowed a seat on the Adolph Coors board of directors along with his two younger brothers, although the ceramics company, which specializes in everything from porcelain medical supplies to bulletproof vests, is among Coors' most profitable subsidiaries.

But, Joe Coors Jr. says, he is neither angry nor bitter anymore. Partly because of his religious faith, but, also, he adds, the faintest note of contempt creeping into his tone: "I'm now seriously convinced it was all the best thing that ever happened to me—because I gained a perspective on life that I think has made me a better, wiser person—one that Jeff and Pete don't have because they grew up strictly in the Coors regimen."

Besides that, he adds, he believes he got what he deserved. "I knew it [his marriage] was a cardinal family rule, my grandfather's. It was a strict no-no, and I violated it anyway." Nor does he blame his father a bit. Joe Sr., after all, was only behaving like a good son himself.

## Coors Don't Whine

He was sincere, he was matter-of-fact, he was convincing. Another lesson about this remarkable clan: It's not a macho thing, it's apparently bred into them—Coors don't whine.

It's the same story with the family's other exile, Grover, although his punishment for rebelliousness was far less harsh and barely lasted two years, before he saw the light, abandoned his hippy ways and high-tailed it home to find, again thanks to Holly Coors, both Jesus Christ and financial security.

A big, relaxed fellow with a quicker sense of humor than the others, he laughs easily and often, particularly at himself, and he seems to relish telling the story of his degenerate days of doing drugs, bed-hopping, protesting the war, even playing in a rock band—and his father's reaction to it.

"Talk about lousy timing," he laughs now. At the time of his own rebellion, Joe Sr. was himself locked in mortal combat with the Students for a Democratic Society chapter at the University of Colorado, and was thus said to have been practically beside himself with shock and outrage to suddenly discover this human dreg of a son in his midst—not only praising George S. McGovern, and studying, not engineering, but the *pipe organ* at Stanford—but even with posters of Ho Chi Minh on his walls, for crying out loud.

"He finally kicked me out of the house in some terrible row over the sexual revolution," Grover recalls, chuckling.

Shortly thereafter, however, Grover began to reconsider his wicked ways. "I first began to see the light when the money started to run out; I discovered that musicians starve," he grins. Besides that, he says, he was never really cut out to be a flower child anyway.

"I was always too into myself to get really committed to Vietnam or any other cause. I did a few protest

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Grover Coors, with wife Sylvia, calls himself "a social liberal."

marches, but I never had any really serious political convictions, and it also occurred to me that protesters sometimes got hurt—this wasn't long after Kent State—and I was always a very low-risk protester, always at the fringe of any real rebellion." He also never lost sight of the fact that he was a Coors.

For example, he says self-mockingly: "Even when I decided to tear up my draft card, I didn't do it out on the streets with the others. I sent it to [former Republican Colorado senator] Pete Dominick—knowing full well he'd just send it to my dad." (In reality, he avoided Vietnam on a student deferment; no other Coors ever has served in the military either.)

"Anyway, I finally just reached the end of my rope. I was destroying myself," he recalls. "There I was, 20 years old, and had nothing to show for myself." (Another apparent legacy of the stern Coors tradition: If you don't have your act together by age 20, you may as well call it quits.)

Looking back, Grover candidly blames his adolescent rebellion on his father's stern, strict, rigidly opinionated ways. "He always saw the world as a straight line; there was no room for departing. His view was, if you don't like it, go somewhere else, and he sometimes took it to excess, so I did. I wanted to embarrass him."

## Did Not Dote on Children

But now, like Joe Jr., he defends his father. "We were raised in the old German tradition. He didn't believe in doting on his kids, he wanted us to develop character on our own. Heck, we were the last family in Golden to even get a color TV! But now I see that he did it all in love."

But, for all their differences in opinion, all five Coors brothers are in harmony on a couple of major points.

First, born-again Christians or not, none have any moral qualms about selling beer for a living. Like a well-trained choir, all the Coors know Uncle Bill's "Beer is Good for You" speech by heart. But they're most comfortable diving straight into the Holy Bible in defense of booze. Even Jesus drank wine, didn't he? And, as Joe Jr. points out, according to the Bible, the first thing Noah reportedly did, once that blasted ark finally hit dry land, was get blind drunk—and he was roundly denounced by all for his lack of self-control.

And there's the key, the Coors credo: moderation in all things. In this self-disciplined crowd, where nobody cusses, overeats or even

smokes anymore, alcoholism isn't an illness—it's a sin.

Secondly, Joe Coors' sons are also in harmony on at least one other point: Homosexuals are an abomination in the eyes of God.

(Bill Coors' son, Scott, however, begs exception—"I don't buy any of that stuff. I got a couple of good friends who're gay.")

Again, it is the mild-mannered Joe Coors Jr. who explains the family position on homosexuality, in the most gentle manner possible, his tone halfway apologetic, begging understanding.

"I believe in the Bible," he says quietly. "And the Bible specifically outlines certain sins, and it calls them that. Not just homosexual behavior, but anything else that gets in the way with your walk with the Lord. But a person's religion is such a personal thing. So, the fact that I choose to believe the Bible is God's word certainly doesn't mean I think gay people, or anybody else, has to believe it, too. It's their choice. What I *don't* like, though, is if they wanna persecute me for mine."

Moreover, he added, gays are not alone in their sinfulness. "Everybody sins. I sin."

Yeah? How?

He paused, startled, floundering momentarily for a legitimate sin. "Well, for one thing . . . Well, I swear, especially when I play gin rummy," he finally said. "And that's a *double* sin. I should be out doing more charitable work, helping people in need, instead of wasting time that way . . ."

Moreover, he added, until only recently he also committed the sin of arrogance, of being personally judgmental. He believed, he says, looking ashamed of himself, that AIDS was God's special retribution to gays.

## Brother Sets Him Straight

But his youngest brother, John, 32, finally straightened him out. "John is such a sweet spiritual soul. So he spent hours, helping me see just how narrow and judgmental my thinking was. He reminded me: 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.' And, face it—my views were just plain stupid. I mean, is cancer God's retribution? Is a car accident?"

John Coors, now head of Coors' customer satisfaction division, seems to be the whole family's personal pet, and even more of a small-town Golden boy than the rest: He got his engineering degree at the Colorado School of Mines, married the daughter of a Coors engineer, is now the father of four and says of his family: "We're so normal we're boring." He's also no

rebel—"I learned from Grover's mistakes."

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Holland (Holly) Hanson Coors made and served iced tea, on a plastic tray, to guests on her back patio.

No servants in sight, the Adolph Coors matriarch was alone in her rambling, but remarkably ordinary, ranch-style home, on a bluff just above the Coors brewery—so near that Holly Coors, just like her neighbors, has long since grown accustomed to the 24-hour drone of the brewery's heavy machinery, the thunder of the company's armada of big-rig trucks and freight trains perpetually moving Coors beer out of Golden and into the nation. A huge red and white Coors sign towers beyond the ponderosa pines rimming her wide lawn.

She is still a pretty woman, and one who obviously takes care of herself. Carefully made-up, her face framed by a halo of tastefully quiet platinum hair, she wore large, youthful blue and pink tinted sunglasses and a sporty but high style blue denim dress with muted rhinestones.

She is also the picture of a woman doing her best to hang on, to cope with the confusion that her life has become since Joe Sr. left Golden for California, and her, for another woman. At one moment, she's radiant, laughing, exuberant about all of life, talking excitedly of the "new wings" President Reagan gave her when he appointed her roving ambassador of the Americas. Then, in the next second, she's glancing away, toward the treetops, fragility itself.

"Losing Joe was so rough," she says quietly, matter-of-fact. "Without the Heavenly Father to see me through, I'd probably be a basket case by now. But God has a design, I'm his child, so if life throws you a curve, you have to remember, this is all just a training ground."

Once upon a time, as a girl, Holly Coors, daughter of a moderately successful Swedish paper manufacturer in Philadelphia, had dreams of her own personal career. She thought of becoming a fashion designer, or perhaps a photojournalist. But she married Joe Coors instead.

And thus entered a world where it went without question that the men ruled, the women obeyed. And for the next 48 years, she did just that.

It wasn't hard. "My mother never questioned my father's authority, so I never questioned Joe's."

When he asked her to give up cigarettes, she did. When he threw her oldest son out of the house, she "cried a lot" but accepted. When he asked her to head the Reagan campaign in Colorado, although "till then all I'd ever done was sit in the back row [of political events] knitting or doing needlepoint," she did.

(Now Holly Coors' two-paged, single-spaced resume puts her husband's to shame. With offices in both Denver and Washington, D.C., she sits on the executive boards of at least two dozen important organizations, half of them presidential appointments, from the U.S. Air Force Academy and the American-Israel Friendship League to the Peace Corps advisory council, plus a dozen different women's, hospital and collegiate groups.)

But the only thing Holly Coors ever really did on her own, without

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# COORS: Estranged Wife Copes With Confusion

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asking her husband's prior approval, up until 1961, was find her own personal God.

"I guess it's a generational thing," she says today. "but I always tried to do anything he [Joe] wanted me to do, because I thought that was what a wife should do, whatever her husband wanted. I never did anything without asking his permission. And I still feel that way, that the man should be the head of the home."

She sounded apologetic, but, then, she often does. It is one of the most notable legacies of her nearly five decades as Mrs. Joe Coors. Only when she's discussing her faith does Holly Coors seem fully self-confident, on firm ground—and she's the sort of caring, considerate woman who will spend hours on the telephone or sitting on a Golden park bench trying to help some distressed stranger find Jesus. As Heinie Foss, the Coors' longtime Golden friend put it: "Holly's almost too good to be true, she's almost nun-like in her willingness to do anything in her power to help anybody."

Other times, however, Holly Coors is a remarkable portrait of naivete, passivity and self-effacement. For all her wealth, the resources at her command, the places she has been and the people she has met, she sometimes seems as sheltered as some small-town spinster who's never even watched the world pass by on TV.

And she knows it. She apologizes for herself constantly for matters both large and small, whether it's over the tea for perhaps being too weak, or should she have put on a nicer dress, or that she doesn't have the foggiest notion of what the Coors-Teamsters dispute is all about, only that, so the Coors men

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Family matriarch Holly Coors and Joe Jr., the family heretic.

say, "They're a bunch of thugs, aren't they?"

She apologizes for not being, as she puts it, "the hard-core right-wing revolutionary" that her husband, Joe, is. She believes more is accomplished with moderation, "but I probably just don't know enough about the issues . . ."

She apologizes, too, for her ignorance about alcoholism. Like the rest of the Coors family, she seems almost programmed to point out that, if Bill Coors' first wife died an alcoholic, "it wasn't from beer." But Holly Coors alone, among the clan, seems genuinely surprised to learn that the devil can reside equally in either kind of bottle. "You can become an alcoholic on beer?" she asked, frowning.

Holly Coors also apologizes for the fact that, to use her favorite term, she is just now like a bird escaping from a gilded cage, with her "new wings." But soon, she

are. And, if that first one does anything out of the accepted behavioral pattern, then he sets a bad precedent for the rest, and they can't tolerate it. It's just their old-fashioned way."

And who knows, she finished, maybe the German men she has been surrounded with all her adult life are right. "It *does* create tough men, doesn't it?" she mused aloud. "I mean, in their system, only the strong survive. It does create tough men . . ."

Who sometimes leave weaker women behind.

"Yes," she sighed, glancing away, toward the towering trees, the big Coors sign beyond.

Meantime, here in Golden, folks are having a terrific time, laying odds on the divorce settlement. Most locals figure old Joe's gonna be lucky to come out of it with enough to buy his new girlfriend a manicure or himself a haircut, especially at California prices.

Unless, of course, Holly Coors persists in her saintly ways.

Which she may. Asked, for instance, why she doesn't now go shopping for a new mate herself, she only stared in shock and said:

"Why, I *couldn't*. I'm still a married woman."

vows, she will not be just another wealthy good Samaritan—she intends to learn how to focus her efforts properly, to move beyond the Pink Ladies to the "work with the women of Latin America on their problems."

And, however indirectly, Holly Coors also apologizes to her son, Joe Jr., for the way he was treated those many years ago, for her weeping passivity.

"I'm not saying I'd behave any differently now, because I don't know," she began, "but I think I would, now, fight harder . . . because I do think little Joe had it too hard. He and his father were never on the greatest of terms, anyway, even when he was a boy, and it just got harder as he grew up. Joe was just, well, so stern."

She paused, searching for better words. "It's a German thing, I think. They expect so much of the first child, it's just the way they